Veganism as Holistic Nonviolence

If you care about values such as fairness, peace, and empathy, and if you think it's wrong to objectify and hurt others, then you already agree with vegan values.

What is veganism?

Veganism is a philosophy, way of living, and social justice movement based on respect and nonviolence towards all sentient beings and the natural world.

Like us, other animals are sentient—that is to say, they are conscious, feeling individuals who value their lives and seek to avoid being harmed. Whenever sentient beings are treated as property or objects for human use, this harms them and constitutes a violation of their rights. Recognizing this, vegans work to abolish all forms of animal use by humans, including agribusiness, experimentation, hunting, zoos, rodeos, and the pet trade. Vegans also seek out peaceful ways of coexisting with other animals in their natural habitats.

Central to veganism are values such as justice, empathy, and non-exploitation. When we become vegan, we endeavour to live in accordance with these values by respecting the rights of all animals, nonhuman and human, and refusing to support violence.

"The greatest problem on earth today is the notion that some lives matter less than others. We imagine that non-human lives hardly matter at all. We live as though our difference from other species entitles us to use them and that they exist for our benefit. This view is not only inaccurate, it is unethical." Sandra Higgins, founder of Go Vegan World and Eden Farmed Animal Sanctuary

Animal rights violations

In politics and the mass media, animal rights issues generally receive much less visibility than human-centric concerns, despite the massive scale of violence that is committed against other animals every day. This lack of public attention to animal oppression is one manifestation of speciesism, the ideology that devalues the rights and interests of the majority of sentient beings simply because they are not human.

Every year, more than 80 billion land animals[1], and more than a trillion fishes[2], are killed by the farming and fishing industries. In the vivisection industry, an estimated 80 million rats, mice, rabbits, dogs, monkeys, horses, fishes, and other animals are experimented on annually, and the industry uses many more for breeding and for their tissues.[3] The industries that exploit our fellow animals invest a great deal of money in lobbying and public relations campaigns to influence policy and convince the public that the work they do is ethical, necessary, and sustainable.[4] These industry narratives obscure the disturbing reality of what it means to treat someone else as an item of property.

We might direct our attention to the violence that the “dairy” industry is based upon. Like other mammals, cows only produce milk after giving birth. Female cows are forcibly impregnated so that humans can appropriate the milk intended for their calves, who are torn away from their mothers within hours or days of birth. Mother cows have been known to desperately try to reunite with their children, crying out in grief for days after the separation. Male calves are usually either sold to be used by the “veal” industry or are killed shortly after birth and discarded. Many of the female calves are raised to

become the next generation of “dairy cows”. They are slaughtered at around 4 to 6 years of age when their milk production declines and their bodies become exhausted due to years of reproductive exploitation. A cow’s natural lifespan is up to 25 years.[5]

From a vegan animal rights perspective, the focus is not on whether farmers, breeders, and vivisectors are adhering to the animal handling (“welfare”) regulations of their country or region; the focus is on the fact that humans are using other animals in the first place. The practice of owning other animals and using them as resources inherently involves rights violations, such as forced and selective breeding (domestication), captivity, separation from family and friends, and slaughter. Living vegan means respecting our fellow animals’ rights to life, freedom, and their natural habitats.

“If we are sincere in our desire to live in a world of peace, we must refuse to support all forms of violence.” Marti Kheel, vegan feminist scholar and activist, 1983

Striving for ecological harmony

1000 years ago, an estimated 4% of Earth’s habitable land* was used for agriculture. Since then, that figure has risen to 44%, as wide expanses of forests and other ecosystems have been destroyed by human activity and replaced with agribusiness operations. Of the land used for agriculture today, about 80% is dedicated to animal farming, including grazing and growing crops to feed to captive animals.[6] Nearly 80% of soybeans and 61% of corn grown globally is used for animal agribusiness.[7] Notably, humans’ use of land has been identified as the leading cause of biodiversity loss.[8]

Around the world, free-living animals such as bears, wolves, coyotes, dingoes, foxes, mountain lions, bobcats, and badgers are intentionally poisoned, shot, or trapped in order to protect animal agribusiness profits.[9] Animal agribusiness is a major source of greenhouse gas emissions[10] and a

**“Habitable land” refers to land that isn’t covered with glaciers, and that isn’t desert or other barren land.*

leading cause of water pollution[11], ocean dead zones[12], and species extinction[13]. Globally, about 32% of human-caused methane emissions come from farmed animals.[14]

In 2018, a University of Oxford study into the environmental impacts of agriculture found that if human societies around the world adopted an animal-free diet, this would enable a reduction in global agricultural land use by 75%.[15] This is due to the fact that using other animals for food is a highly inefficient use of resources. A widespread shift to veganism would mean that areas of land that had previously been covered in a single crop (grass, corn, etc.) could be allowed to grow wild, returning important habitat to the nonhuman species that originally lived there.

According to Joseph Poore, lead author of the University of Oxford study, "A vegan diet is probably the single biggest way to reduce your impact on planet Earth, not just greenhouse gases, but global acidification, eutrophication, land use and water use."[16]

The connections between animal rights and environmentalism go beyond these impacts. In recognition that our fellow animals have a right to live in their natural habitats, the vegan ethic invites us to stay aware of ecological issues and question consumer culture.

"Veganism advocates harmony, justice, and empathic living by acknowledging and respecting the interconnectedness of all life." Jo Stepaniak, vegan author

Out of the Dust of War

For centuries prior to the founding of the modern vegan movement, critical thinkers around the world spoke out against various forms of animal exploitation, and they sought to find ways of living that avoided those forms of violence. Pythagoras and Buddha, for example, opposed the practice of killing other animals for food or sacrifice. Around 1000 CE in the Middle East, the blind philosopher al-Ma'arri wrote a poem in which he called on humans to stop consuming the flesh of fishes and other animals; nonhuman mothers' milk; birds' eggs; and honey. He urged his readers to "not desire as food […] the white milk of mothers who intended its pure draught/for their young", and to "spare the honey which the bees get industriously/from the flowers of fragrant plants;/For they did not store it that it might belong to others".[17]

In Western countries, the immediate precursor to the modern vegan movement was the vegetarian movement of the 1800's. There was considerable overlap between the vegetarian movement and other social justice movements of the time, such as women's suffrage, anti-vivisection, and opposition to slavery. Vegetarians who rejected dairy and other animal products came to be known as "non-dairy vegetarians".[18]

In 1944, towards the end of the Second World War, the word "vegan" was coined by Dorothy Morgan and Donald Watson in the UK.[19] A number of the vegan movement's founders were conscientious objectors to war. During the first few decades of the modern vegan movement's history, advocates wrote about how the vegan ethic of nonviolence, fairness, and compassion would transform humans' relations with other animals, with each other, and with the rest of the natural world. Veganism has always been focused, first and foremost, on ending nonhuman animal exploitation, but its scope has also encompassed a broader array of concerns, such as peace, ecological harmony, healthier lifestyles, and food security.

"I felt that veganism freed my conscience of a great burden, wherein the exploitation of animals by [humanity] was a long-standing crime. [The] philosophy of non-violence toward animals inevitably led into non-violence toward human beings. […] I declared myself a conscientious objector" Rubin Abramowitz, 1964

“Veganism is a practical expression of the Oneness of all Life. Veganism is basic, as it would not only do away with slaughter, vivisection, hunting, and fishing, but no doubt also with human exploitation.” Catherine Nimmo, 1961

“If the vegan ideal of non-exploitation were generally adopted it would be the greatest peaceful revolution ever known” Donald Watson, as reported by Dugald Semple in 1947

What to eat?

One important aspect of becoming vegan involves adopting a 100% plant-based diet. Vegan-friendly meals are centred around fruits, vegetables, whole grains (rice, oats, bread, pasta, quinoa, etc.), legumes (beans, peas, peanuts, and lentils), nuts, and seeds. In addition to these staples, you can find vegan-friendly prepared foods, such as plant milks, ready-meals, and more, at grocery and health food stores.

Chances are, you are already using a number of the animal-free foods mentioned above, and many familiar recipes can easily be “veganized” by using plant-based ingredients instead of animal products.

In cookbooks and online, there are countless vegan recipes, ranging from simple to complex, from a variety of cultures and culinary traditions. You can also find resources created by and for vegans with specific dietary needs, such as gluten-free or low-FODMAP. No matter what type of vegan diet you follow, it’s important to include a reliable source of vitamin B12, such as by using fortified plant milks or taking a supplement.

Happy Cow, a popular website and app, provides helpful information about restaurants and cafes offering vegan-friendly fare.

“Veganism is about protecting the rights and interests of all sentient beings. It is a vision of a new world, a non-violent world—or at least a lot less violent world compared to what we have now. Veganism is peace, co-operation, and community. Veganism is respect and responsibility.” Roger Yates, vegan sociologist

Veganism as holistic social justice

Veganism involves an ethical opposition to all animal use. As such, vegans seek out alternatives to animal skins ("leather"), hair ("wool", "angora", and "fur"), and beeswax, while refusing to attend rodeos, zoos, or horseback riding events. Vegans also use cleaning products and personal care products that are free from animal-derived ingredients and animal testing. Some vegans live with rescued dogs, cats, or other animals, but vegans don't support the practice of breeding nonhuman animals into existence for human companionship.

As the founders of our movement noted, when we become vegan, we experience a paradigm shift in how we relate to other animals, other humans, and the natural world. In more recent decades, scholars and activists have highlighted how speciesism is interconnected—historically, materially, and conceptually—with sexism, racism, ableism, colonialism, war, and environmental destruction. The sociologist David Nibert's 2013 book, *Animal Oppression and Human Violence*, is one example of scholarship that illuminates these entanglements. In the 1980s, vegan ecofeminists such as the scholar and activist Marti Kheel, co-founder of Feminists for Animal Rights, were already raising awareness about the links between the oppression of women and the oppression of other animals and nature.[20]

To embrace a vegan mindset is to seek justice for all sentient beings. A vegan way of approaching ethical decision-making would centre questions such as

- Is this fair?
- How can we do the best we can to avoid supporting violence and injustice?
- How can our words and actions help encourage a culture of peace and respect for all animals, nonhuman and human?

"[T]here is a war being waged, every day, against countless millions of nonhuman animals. To stand truly for peace is to stand firmly against speciesism. It is wishful thinking to believe that there can be "peace in the world" if we fail to bring peace to our dealings with other animals." Tom Regan, animal rights philosopher

Some helpful websites about veganism and animal rights

- GoVeganWorld.com
- Veganic.world
- HumaneMyth.org
- PeaceableKingdomFilm.org
- OnHumanRelationsWithOtherSentientBeings.weebly.com
- AlwaysforAnimalRights.blogspot.com
- TheresanElephantintheRoomBlog.wordpress.com
- Howdoigovegan.com

This booklet was written and designed by Carolyn Harris, long-time vegan advocate and host of Always for Animal Rights radio show and podcast.

A PDF version of this booklet with clickable links can be found online at tinyurl.com/veganbooklet. Please consider giving this booklet to others whom you think may find it helpful, once you have finished using it. Thank you!

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"Our obligations to nonhuman animals are not a matter of charity or mercy; they are a matter of fundamental justice." Gary Francione, professor and author

Photo courtesy of La Ferme de l'Aube, vegan organic (veganic) farm in Quebec, Canada.

If you care about values such as fairness, peace, and empathy, and if you think it’s wrong to objectify and hurt others, then you already agree with vegan values. Please make the commitment to start living vegan today. For further details about why and how to become vegan, see GoVeganWorld.com.

Photo courtesy of La Ferme de l'Aube,
vegan organic (veganic) farm in Quebec, Canada.

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Respect all sentient beings

This booklet was written and designed by Carolyn Harris, long-time vegan advocate and host of Always for Animal Rights radio show and podcast.